



KAUPPO KIRKAS

“EXCITEMENT AND DANGER”

Pianist Danny Driver in Conversation

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Danny Driver may be the best pianist you’ve never heard. The British native, now in his early 40s, is one of the world-class artists who record for the prestigious UK record company Hyperion along with Marc-André Hamelin, Stephen Hough and Angela Hewitt among others.

Driver’s decade-long relationship with Hyperion Records has yielded a wide-ranging discography of works by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, Handel, York Bowen, Benjamin Dale, Mili Balakirev, Robert Schumann and Erik Chisholm. Of his first volume of CPE Bach *Sonatas*, Bryce Morrison wrote in *Gramophone*: “It would be impossible to overestimate Driver’s impeccable technique and musicianship ... his is one of the finest of all recent keyboard issues.” His most recent release, cited by *The New York Times* as one of 2017’s Best Classical Recordings, featured piano concertos by Amy Beach, Dorothy Howell and Cécile Chaminade. On March 5, he makes a welcome return to the Jane Mallett Theatre in the St. Lawrence Centre under the auspices of Music Toronto. The following afternoon he gives a masterclass at U of T’s Edward Johnson Building, something he also did on his last visit here, two years ago. His empathetic interchanges with the students and musical insights were impressive then and promise to be equally memorable March 6.

In a revealing eight-minute video available on Facebook and posted on his website, Driver talked about why Sviatoslav Richter headed a list of pianists he loved – “because of his meticulous attention to detail and his refusal to compromise” – and spoke about being the product of many different influences including science (which he studied at Cambridge University). “In a sense everything is connected,” he said. “Part of the excitement and the danger of musical performance is [that] ultimately I don’t come to it with really strongly conceived notions. Principles yes, but there’s so much that can happen, that might happen. It’s very difficult to explain where that comes from.”

The WholeNote celebrates this singular pianist’s upcoming recital with the following mid-January 2019 conversation.

WN: What are your first memories of playing the piano?

DD: At school, I watched my schoolmates playing simple pieces on the piano in front of the class and decided that I too wanted to have a go. The first time I played in front of my peers I used only my left and right thumbs (on middle C and middle B respectively)... fortunately for my audiences things have moved forward somewhat since.

Please describe the musical atmosphere in your home growing up.

I was encouraged to develop my musical skills (I also played the clarinet and French horn, and composed) but not to the exclusion of other things. Growing up I had a range of interests, including languages, science and sport. This breadth helped me to understand